

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 02297 102258Z

70

ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CCO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USSS-00 /031 W

----- 079303

O 102207Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1689

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY RABAT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

DOD WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2297

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASEC, PINS, SY

SUBJ: EXPLOSION AT NATIONAL CASH REGISTER OFFICE, DAMASCUS

1. AT 1812 LOCAL (1612Z), OCTOBER 10, BOMB BLAST OCCURRED AT OFFICE OF NATIONAL CASH REGISTER (NCR), DAMASCUS, ONE BLOCK FROM NEW OMAIYAD HOTEL. FOLLOWING REPORT OBTAINED FROM LONGTIME SYRIAN NCR REPRESENTATIVE, GEORGES ABDINI.

2. ABDINI ARRIVED APPROXIMATELY 10 MINUTES AFTER BLAST. BUILDING WHERE NCR LOCATED CONSISTS OF NCR OFFICES IN BASEMENT, GROUND FLOOR AND FIRST FLOOR. SECOND AND THIRD FLOORS ARE OCCUPIED BY SARG GENERAL AUTHORITY FOR MARITIME TRANSPORT. FOURTH FLOOR OCCUPIED BY PRIVATE ENGINEERING COMPANY. ABDINI SAID HIS OPINION WAS THAT EXPLOSIVE CHARGE PLACED OUTSIDE MAIN, GROUND FLOOR ENTRANCE TO OFFICE. FLOOR BELOW BLAST POINT HAD HOLE AS WELL AS CEILING ABOVE. ALL DOORS AND WINDOWS IN GROUND FLOOR, L-SHAPED OFFICE BLOWN OUT, CONSIDERABLE FIRE DAMAGE (INITIAL LOSS ESTIMATED
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AT LS 1.5 MILLION (CA. \$370,000) IN EQUIPMENT AND RECORDS.)

3. ABDINI SAID HIS "BEST OFFICE BOY," AGE 45 WITH NCR FOR SEVEN OR EIGHT YEARS, HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO BRING IN PRODUCE FROM HIS FARM AND WAS SELLING FROM LOCATION IN FRONT OF MAIN ENTRANCE. HE WAS KILLED BY BLAST OR FALLING STONES.

4. DURING RAMADAN PERIOD, 37 EMPLOYEES NORMALLY IN THREE FLOORS OF NCR OFFICE LEAVE WORK AT 1430, SO ANYONE WISHING TO DESTROY THE OFFICE WOULD BE WELL AWARE THAT NO EMPLOYEES WOULD BE INSIDE AT TIME OF BLAST.

5. BUILDING HAS THREE LANDLORDS, DOCTORS AND DENTISTS, WITH NO CONNECTIONS OR POLITICAL TIES AS FAR AS ABDINI IS AWARE; "SHY PEOPLE" WAS HIS DESCRIPTION.

6. WHILE ABDINI AND FRIENDS WORKING OVER DEBRIS, DEFENSE MINISTER TLAS CAME BY TO INSPECT DAMAGE AND PAY RESPECTS. GOVERNOR OF DAMASCUS ALSO VISITED SCENE. ABDINI TOLD BY NCR EMPLOYEE THAT PRESIDENT ASAD'S BROTHER, RIFAT ASAD ALSO CAME BY. POLICE WERE VERY COOPERATIVE, DEBRIS ON STREET CLEANED UP QUICKLY, BUT WINDOWS AND DOORS REMAIN BLOWN OUT WITH NO COVERS. POLICE BLOCKED OFF STREET FOR SEVERAL HOURS AFTER BLAST AND THOSE MAKING INQUIRIES WERE TOLD EXPLOSION DUE TO BUTANE GAS TANKS.

7. ABDINI IS ALSO HONORARY CONSUL GENERAL FOR AUSTRIA. HE COULD RECALL NO NCR OR AUSTRIAN MATTERS THAT WOULD HAVE LET TO ATTACK. HE SAID HE HAD RECEIVED NO SUSPICIOUS CALLS OR MAIL THAT WOULD HAVE WARNED HIM OF ATTACK.

8. ABDINI SAID THAT NEVER IN ALL HIS YEARS AS NCR REPRESENTATIVE IN DAMASCUS HAD ANY UNTOWARD INCIDENT OCCURRED, EVEN IN TENSE MONTHS IN 1967. HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF AS ONLY AMERICAN COMPANY REPRESENTATIVE OPERATING IN SYRIA WITH CLEARLY IDENTIFIABLE OFFICE, SHOWROOM, STAFF, SALESMEN, SALES AND REPAIR OFFICE. (COMMENT: THERE ARE, OF COURSE, MANY SYRIAN IMPORTERS OF AMERICAN EQUIPMENT; WE ALSO BELIEVE CATERPILLER TRACTOR MAY HAVE AN OPERATION SIMILAR TO NCR'S.)

9. COMMENT: WHILE INVESTIGATION THIS LATEST BLAST IS ONLY
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JUST UNDERWAY, WE VIEW IT AS THIRD IN SERIES OF "WARNINGS" SINCE AUGUST AGAINST US PRESENCE DAMASCUS AND SYRIAN-US RAPPROCHEMENT. TIMING THIS LATEST BLAST WE SEE AS DIRECT PROTEST AGAINST SECRETARY'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS TOMORROW.

10. I DISCUSSED PROTECTIVE SECURITY MEASURES WITH COS SHIHABI AT 2230 LOCAL. HE ASSURES US THERE NO NEED HAVE ANY CONCERN FOR WELFARE US CITIZENS NOW IN DAMASCUS OR

FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY ARRIVING TOMORROW. I CONCUR AND
RECOMMEND VISIT PROCEED AS SCHEDULED.
MURPHY

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NNN

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